

Message Text

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 01 DHAHRA 00488 151313Z
ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SS-15 SSO-00 PM-05 SP-02 EB-08
INR-10 INRE-00 CIAE-00 /051 W
-----035132 151441Z /41
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FM AMCONSUL DHAHRAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6170
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
USLO RIYADH IMMEDIATE

C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAHRANI 0488

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: ENRG, SA
SUBJECT: ANOTHER OIL/GAS FIRE IN THE ABQAIQ AREA

REF: DHAHRAN 0486

1. ONE OF THE MOST SENIOR AMERICAN EXECUTIVES AT ARAMCO HAS PROVIDED CONSUL GENERAL WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION ON GOSP NO. 3 FIRE, BUT HAS STATED THAT THE INFORMATION MUST BE CLOSELY HELD AND NOT RPT NOT ATTRIBUTED TO ARAMCO UNTIL SAUDI GOVERNMENT AUTHORIZES RELEASE. DEPARTMENT WILL RECALL THAT SAG WAS EXTREMELY SENSITIVE ABOUT DISTORTED REPORTS OF THE TWO MAJOR ABQAIQ FIRES LAST YEAR AND RESULTING NEAR PANIC IN TOKYO (AND TO LESSER EXTENT IN NEW YORK). SAG APPARENTLY REALIZES THAT SPECULATION ABOUT POSSIBLE SABOTAGE COULD BE EVEN MORE WIDESPREAD THIS TIME, AND HAS TOLD ARAMCO TO RELEASE NO INFORMATION UNTIL AUTHORIZED BY SAG.

2. ACCORDING TO THE SENIOR EXECUTIVE, SAUDI MINISTER OF PETROLEUM ZAKI YAMANI AND PETROMIN GOVERNOR MR. TAHER HAVE ALREADY ARRIVED IN DHAHRAN TO SUPERVISE INVESTIGATION AND REPAIR WORK. THE FIRE, WHICH IS STILL BURNING, WAS THE RESULT OF A "MASSIVE" SERIES OF EXPLOSIONS AT 0145
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APRIL 15. THE PLANT IS "SEVERLY" DAMAGED, WITH ONLY A FEW PARTS SALVAGEABLE. THE EXECUTIVE STATED THAT THE EXPLOSIONS FLATTENED ALL BUILDINGS IN THE AREA, AND HURLED SOME TANKS 2500 FEET AWAY FROM THEIR FOUNDATIONS. ARAMCO PLANS TO LET THE FIRE BURN OUT, BUT DOES NOT KNOW HOW MUCH OIL REMAINS IN THE FACILITY OR HOW LONG THE FIRE WILL CONTINUE.

3. THE EXECUTIVE STATED IN RESPONSE TO DIRECT INQUIRY FROM CONSUL GENERAL THAT "FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES THE FIRE WILL HAVE NO EFFECT ON ARAMCO PRODUCTION". HE ADDED THAT THE PLANT WAS ALREADY PRODUCING AT A LOW RATE, CAN BE QUICKLY BY-PASSED, AND PRODUCTION CAN BE IMMEDIATELY INCREASED AT OTHER GOSPS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN PRODUCTION A PRE-FIRE LEVEL.

4. ACCORDING TO THE EXECUTIVE, ONLY EIGHT ARAMCO PEOPLE AND ONE CONTRACTOR SUPPLIED GUARD WERE AT THE SITE WHEN THE EXPLOSION OCCURRED. ONE ARAMCO MAN IS STILL MISSING, TWO ARAMCONS ARE DEAD, ONE CONTRACTOR EMPLOYEE IS DEAD. THREE MEN ARE IN SATISFACTORY CONDITION, AND TWO ARAMCONS ARE BADLY BURNED AND IN THE ARAMCO HOSPITAL. NO AMERICANS WERE AT THE FIRE DURING THE EXPLOSION, AND ARAMCO BELIEVES THE CASUALTIES ARE ALL SAUDIS.

5. WE INTEND TO GET A FIRST-HAND LOOK AT THE FIRE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND TO CHECK PARTICULARLY CLOSELY INTO THE QUESTION OF POSSIBLE SABOTAGE. THE ARAMCO EXECUTIVE STATED THAT SURVIVING PERSONNEL REPORT HAVING HEARD ESCAPING GAS IN THE AREA JUST BEFORE THE EXPLOSION, SO HE BELIEVES SABOTAGE WAS NOT INVOLVED. WE EXPECT A GREAT DEAL OF SKEPTICISM ON THAT POINT, HOWEVER, AND WILL BE LOOKING AT THE SABOTAGE QUESTION VERY CLOSELY.
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Message Attributes

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